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English Education Mentoring

Notes of a Humbled WPA: Dialogue with High School Colleagues

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Introduction

In the 1970s, as I completed my undergraduate degree in English education at Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts, I worked at Copley Square High School as a student teacher. One of my practice teaching classes, under the guidance of senior teacher Steve Gordon, was the college preparatory writing course for seniors. I had already worked in the Northeastern University Writing Center as an undergraduate tutor, and had colleagues teaching first-year composition there. I was able to bring seniors from Copley Square High to visit the first-year writing courses at Northeastern. I hoped instinctively at the time that exposure to college classes would first inspire the students to attend college and then ease their transition from high school to college. I felt privileged to be simultaneously in the high school classroom and close to the college writing classroom. My career took other paths and I ended up a university teacher, but I hear echoes of my first teaching experiences more and more frequently.

Twenty-five years later, as WPA at the selective University of Maine-Farmington, a public liberal arts institution with a well known College of Education, I have felt personal frustration with my college students' claims about what they never did in high school. I find a dearth of available information about how students experience the high school-to-college transition in the writing classroom. I have been humbled by the discovery that in spite of my initial teaching experiences, I know next to nothing about high school writing and high school English classes—and I am not alone. I have been equally humbled by the rich, insightful, theoretical discussions I have had recently with my colleagues in Maine high schools. I have been reminded that the average high school English teacher is just that—an English teacher, not a dedicated composition teacher—and thus faces a much wider variety of curricular demands. These experiences have led me to explore paths for systematically exchanging information with my high school writing colleagues about this crucial transition.

High school students arriving to college first-year writing courses appear to find that much of what they have learned in the previous years is unrelated to what is now being asked of them. College faculty seem to know little about what high school teachers are asking students to do and why, and less about what high school students bring with them to the college writing classroom. High school teachers wonder whether they are

preparing students most effectively for college work, while being required to prepare them to succeed on national, state-wide and local assessments. Student writers moving from high school to college are affected by this gap in communication and in pedagogy. The gap appears to be entrenched in a relative lack of available information to teachers across grades and institutions about each other's activities and expectations. It is further cemented by the lack of high school faculty voices in the literature about the transition to college writing.

In Maine, where the work described here is situated, recent reports have focused on gaps in the readiness of Maine college students and in articulation of goals and expectations between high schools and colleges. The University of Maine system has instituted a "college readiness" task force to consider questions about students' success across grade levels and to explore the mismatch between state-mandated high school outcomes and actual college expectations across disciplines. While collaborations among high schools and colleges—school partnerships, workshops for high school faculty by college programs, National Writing Project summer institutes—have been successfully operating here for quite some time, they do not focus on the specific nature of the high school-to-college transition students must navigate in and through their writing. Maine is surely not the only state facing these issues.

This article describes the preliminary exploratory process used to develop the research questions that will be addressed during a project to be offered in the 2005–2006 academic year. The project will bring together Maine high school and college faculty to learn from each other about our shared needs, methods and priorities, in a year long series of "conversations." These will tackle questions generated by exploratory research, using focus groups of both high school and college faculty and first-year college students, as well as key informant interviews. The main purpose of these conversations will be to address the research questions by sharing knowledge about theory and practice in a guided setting. The article reviews the available literature, summarizes the research questions that have been developed in the exploratory focus group discussions, argues for the need to seek out high school and college voices early in the research process, and briefly outlines the 2005–2006 project.

What We Know from Existing Scholarship

Available published research identifies misperceptions by high school and college faculty about each other's work, describes many of the actual shifts in expectations as students enter college, and identifies specific collaborative efforts between high school and college faculty and institutions. It also shows insufficiencies in three key areas of knowledge: little published research enables high school faculty voices in the discussion about students' readiness for college work, offers research findings about the actual high school-to-college transition, or clarifies what researchers in the different domains of cognitive-developmental and social theory might have to say to each other about college readiness.

Misperceptions by high school and college faculty about each other's work:

Many high school and college teachers have different understandings of what college writing courses are about. One study surveyed writing teachers at the University of California and local high schools about their priorities.[1] A number of the high school teachers preparing students for college emphasized reading and interpreting literature, considered writing as a way of expressing a pre-formed meaning, suggested formulas for structuring essays, and taught students that the use of the first-person *I* would not be acceptable in college (cited in Hjortshoj 28–29). High school teachers comment that their

assumptions about how to prepare students for college are often based largely on their own undergraduate classroom experiences (Gardner 101). The authority a teacher gains from being able to say to a high school student "you will need to know this in college" is a powerful motivator (Stump, personal interview, 2005). In the University of California study cited above, however, a number of the college teachers reported different priorities: using a range of reading materials, emphasizing writing for discovering and exploring meaning, discouraging formulas for essay structures, and considering the use of *I* to be appropriate (qtd. in Hjortshoj 28–29).

College writing faculty are unfortunately not much more informed about the high school classroom, other than what they remember from their own experiences or isolated examples such as their own high school-aged children. They do not systematically study high school assessments or outcomes documents. They are often unaware of the deeply different experience of high school teaching. Fortune, Lamonica, and Neulieb, for example, describe high school classes of noisy and active students with abundant energy, students who know each other well (15–16). High school teachers may work harder than college colleagues, often teaching far more students and reading literally hundreds of papers; Daiker describes them as more "giving of self," in a teaching situation that requires "total response" (10) for hours at a time.[2] That response includes working with students' parents (Stump, personal interview, 2005).

Shifts in expectations as students enter college:

At least some of the high school students arriving to college experience dramatic shifts in the expectations they face. The many in-house publications produced by colleges and universities for incoming first-year students build on this shift in expectations. "One of the things you'll discover freshman year," says the Harvard guide *Making the Most of College Writing,* "is that the five-paragraph essay and other structures you've relied on in the past will not be flexible enough to meet the more complex demands of college writing" (6). It continues, "In college, professors will expect—and reward—ambitious topics, interesting questions, thorough analyses, and convincing arguments" (6), suggesting that in high school these were not expected. Dombek and Herndon, in their 2004 book *Critical Passages: Teaching the Transition to College Composition,* describe the standard forms and skills of summarizing, arranging information, providing supporting points for clear claims, clarity, or coherence as "too simple and limiting to succeed in creating the kind of writing we ask of our [college] students. Advanced academic essays should require more: they should ask writers to pose rigorous questions and speculate about multiple possible answers, analyze several texts at once, sustain complicated trains of thought . . ." (Dombek and Herndon 4).

Cobbs's 2002 study of students, *From Where They Sit: Stories of Students Making the Transition from High School Writing to College Writing,* bears out this difficulty. First-year students in her study struggled with reading college-level assignments and making sense of feedback on their writing. They applied the parts of the assignment instructions with which they were most comfortable from their high school experiences, and were surprised by college teachers' attention to grammatical errors and by how long college essays were supposed to be (181).[3]

Keith Hjortshoj, in his text for first-year students *The Transition to College Writing,* tells students that "in some very fundamental ways a college or a university is a different kind of learning environment in which you must become a different kind of student" (3). College means turning a corner, finding previous knowledge useful but only if the student can apply it to new situations. College courses, he suggests, are not a direct continuation of high school courses. In addition, the academic freedom enjoyed by many

college teachers leads to sometimes dramatic variations in the ways classes are taught (14–16), another major difference for students.

Students, of course, are quite aware of these shifts. In one experiment reported by Perry, college students asked to comment on high school students' papers suggested to their high school peers that college teachers invite risk and exploration of ideas, while high school teachers give structure and guidelines (4). Some of the college students actually reported nostalgia for the guided high school prompts and clear expectations (5).

Collaborative efforts between high school and college faculty and institutions:

To be very clear, both research and other collaborative work between high school and college teachers is, in many settings, flourishing. The National Writing Project and state Writing Project organizations, events like the renowned University of New Hampshire summer program and recent Keene State summer programs, and dozens of individual programs and efforts across the country create safe and productive environments for shared writing, curriculum development, writing teacher development, improved communication, and other rich experiences. The City University of New York-NYC Board of Education partnership, "Looking Both Ways," founded in 1998 has succeeded in bringing together high school and college faculty to talk about literacy development, classroom practice, and "the tensions of teaching writing." The program is founded on the belief that high school and college faculty need to respect each other, dialogue, visit each other's settings, and share inquiry and reading sessions (www.lbw.cuny.edu [1]).

Unfortunately, however, current literature about high school-college collaborations in writing instruction is difficult to find.[4] "Type 'high school/college writing partnerships' into [any] search engine and the results are likely to be . . . sparse," Perry says. "With few exceptions, such programs tend to fall into the areas of dual or joint enrollment or advanced placement programs" (1). Even though such collaborations are happening, much of the literature that is written about them is from the university perspective, often works by administrators describing collaborative efforts, the latter published largely in the 1980s (for a sampling of these articles, see this article's bibliography).

These programs almost unilaterally take place on college campuses, implying, Perry suggests, that college is still the privileged place for teacher development (5). Even the "Looking Both Ways" program describes its purpose as training teachers to better prepare students for the English Regents exam, and offers its programs at higher education sites. In addition, the actual transition from high school to college—students' experiences and writing teachers' understandings—is not the focus of most of these programs.

Absence of high school faculty voices:

In the limited set of books and articles readily available about the high school-college writing transition, the stories are almost always told *by* college researchers *about* the high school-to-college experience or the supposed "deficiencies" in high school learning. Some of the post-secondary work appears to have been written without consultation with high school faculty. Cobbs points out that what little research there is into students' writing experiences in high school, as related to their experiences in college, focuses quite often on asking current college students to reflect back to high school (15). Notable exceptions include Cobbs own work, Estrem's 2000 study, *A Study of Two Cultures and the Travelers Who Must Negotiate Them: High School Senior and College First-Year English Classes,* and Binns' 2004 study, *Effects of Prior Writing-to-Learn Instruction as Students Make the Transition from High School to College*

(see annotated bibliography for brief summaries of these references).

Much of the scholarship about writing pedagogy and teacher-research at the secondary level does not explore the transition to college writing either. It generally emphasizes the writing process, multi-genre essays, exploration, and creative research projects (see for example works by Tom Romano, Margaret Soven, Linda Rief, and Nancy Atwell).[5]

Little focus on the actual high school-to-college transition:

What little research there is focused on the actual period of transition suggests that high school writing courses cannot be seen simply as a "feeder" for college writing courses. Jaxon encourages us to "imagine programs that enrich their [students'] writing experiences *while in high school*" (8) (emphasis mine), rather than asking them to begin working on college writing in high school. The students in senior high school English and first-year college composition may be only weeks apart in age, but, as Alsup and Bernard-Donals point out, they are simply not the same group: they are cognitively, developmentally, and emotionally different (131).

The very notion of an essence of "high school writing" or "college writing" is misguided. Nicolini emphasizes that "[E]ven if I saw my primary responsibility as a high school teacher to 'get 'em ready' for college, I don't know exactly how I could do this. How do I get Jim ready for Stanford while getting Maria ready for MIT and Agnes ready for Ball State and Vince ready for Purdue . . . ?" (Budden et al. 76).

Beyond this diversity of destinations, what of the many high school students not planning to go to college? Alsup and Bernard-Donals point out that high school and college writing classes have distinctly different missions (117), and Jaxon argues that a "college" paper must be written in college; it is simply not the same artifact when produced in the high school classroom with its attendant atmosphere, goals, and student groups (9).[6] This means that work on the transition from one to the other needs to move from a conceptual frame of "seamless transition" to a frame of "readiness" (Alsup and Bernard-Donals 130–131).

Little communication between cognitive-developmental and social theory:

Here again, we find little information in the literature about collaborative secondary-postsecondary research into the concept of readiness. Cognitive-developmental theory and social theory could both help in exploring the question of readiness, but the exchanges are infrequent between these two theoretical approaches. Cognitive-developmental theory is more often studied in education programs, and social theory is more often an influence on composition theory and college writing instruction.

Some of the literature suggests that the key might be in defining "readiness." Lave and Wenger, for example, build from the extensive body of research in the past twenty years about the college setting as a new community. They argue that college students' writing success is largely due to the successful adoption of a college identity (ctd. in Jaxon p. 9); students need to "imagine what it might mean to become a member of the academy" (Jaxon 11), rather than learn a set of skills we imagine to be transferable. In *Literacy as Everyday Practice: Case Studies of Students and Literacy Instruction in High School, Community College and University Writing Classes,* Oates argues that we must guide students to understanding that "they are learning not simply new forms of written language, but that more so, they are learning to participate in unfamiliar forms of social interaction" (v). Literacy, in this broad social sense, is not an autonomous set of

academic skills but a socially situated and defined activity (Jaxon 3). “Readiness,” broadly defined, might include the acquisition of whatever enables a student to imagine him or herself in a particular way, or to be open to participating in unfamiliar forms of social interaction.

High schools and colleges alike might better focus on habits of mind and dispositions, not skills and tasks (Budden et al. 74), a set of flexible strategies for understanding and joining new “communities.” Teachers might, then, work to scaffold students’ interest in adopting these habits and strategies, offering students experiences in ways that expand their repertoire of available practices (Kent, personal interview).

This perspective, of course, rankles those scholars who have built general learning theories on the cognitive-developmental model of skills transfer. But there is developmental research that embraces broader perspectives, in particular that inspired by Vygotskien cognitive psychology. Vygotsky’s theory of zones of proximal development, widely used in European scholarship about writing development, depicts learning as occurring in a zone of difference between a student’s actual abilities (how he/she problem solves currently) and his/her potential development, determined by how he/she problem solves in collaboration with an adult or a more capable peer (Jaxon 3). This theory suggests that teachers need to pitch work that is neither too unchallenging (firmly set at students’ current ability level) nor beyond students’ zone of proximal development (Alsup and Bernard-Donals 128).

We should see this cognitive-developmental research as assisting in our understanding of readiness and complementing social perspectives. Unfortunately, the gap between education research and composition theory research is striking; as for practice, future high school teachers in education programs have little contact with composition theorists or even college writing teachers, once they have completed first-year writing requirements. Secondary English education faculty and English or composition faculty at colleges and universities often seem to exist in different spheres. Turf wars over who might teach the “Writing/Teaching of Writing” course at various institutions is a good case in point. WPAs and English educators rarely communicate in spite of their parallel work in preparing teachers of writing who will work with the same population at different developmental points (Tremmel 1).

Tremmel points out that “English teacher educators have yet to settle on a full commitment to viewing themselves as professional writing teacher educators” (9), but we can certainly also point to writing program administrators’ traditional disinterest in secondary education, in spite of the shared marginalization and neglect both groups traditionally share (Tremmel 3). Indeed, college writing instructors should be the first to feel a strong sense of solidarity with high school faculty on the subject of transferability. College teachers find themselves under siege from their colleagues across the disciplines who expect first-year composition to teach students the writing skills they need for success across the curriculum and who question writing programs when students are not delivered to them “fault-free.”

II. Exploratory Inquiry into High School and College Concerns in Maine

My interest in exploring the ways in which the issues described in the literature are playing out in practice in the Maine secondary-postsecondary public education system has led to the development of a collaborative research project, the “Calderwood Conversations.” This project will take place during the 2005–2006 academic year, funded by the Calderwood Writing Initiative[7] The project will be described in more detail

in section III; here, I will describe the current situation in Maine and the exploratory work done to develop the research questions that will guide the Calderwood project.

The specific case of Maine: concerns about college readiness

In 2004 the MELMAC Education Foundation hosted a statewide conference for university and community college representatives, designed to explore priorities for improving Maine students' access to and success in college. While Maine K-12 students succeed at higher rates than in many other states, college enrollment and college graduation rates are lower than in other states: "Maine's K-12 students, while achieving success in elementary and secondary school, under-perform in post-secondary education" (MELMAC Education Foundation 5). The Mitchell Institute's 2002 *Barriers to Postsecondary Education*comes to the same conclusionsas the Foundation about priority areas for action: the need to help high school students connect their college aspirations to a specific plan of action, and the need to support early success in college (9).

According to a report prepared for the University of Maine Chancellor's Task Force on College Readiness, one of the key areas in which this connection and support is not happening is writing instruction:

Many students who graduate from Maine high schools, meet the State's standardized "Learning Results," and are accepted to college are not prepared for college-level writing. The SAT, which most of the System's universities use to measure college readiness, Maine's Learning Results, and the tasks given to students in the first weeks of 100-level writing courses in college all focus on students' abilities to

- evaluate an author's assumptions, point of view, and purpose.
- analyze and synthesize concepts and details.
- determine the relevance of information in a passage.

This correspondence suggests that these particular aspects of the Learning Results are important to students' access to and success in higher education.

The Learning Results frequently use terms such as "evaluate" and "analyze," but do not refer to arguments, evidence, or logic, which tend to be central to discussions of writing at the college level. In the Learning Results and in the local assessments used to measure students' learning, there is much more focus on "point of view" and "opinion" than on any of these terms.

The Maine Educational Assessment writing prompts separate reading from writing, asking students to produce narratives filled with detailed description. They are significantly different from the prompts found on the new SAT and those used by Maine Universities for determining whether or not students need remediation. (Chancellor's Report on College Readiness 1)

Notice in particular that these students *are* achieving on standardized tests and *are* meeting state and local expectations. This implies that the trouble might at least partly be at the level of what those expectations are and their articulation between high school and college. Maine is not alone in this problem. According to *Mixed Messages: What State High School Tests Communicate about Student Readiness for College,* of the twenty five states using or developing high school exit exams to certify graduation, only Georgia describes the exam as able to identify college readiness (1). Most state officials agree that skills and abilities needed in college are not linked to the content of the high school exit exams (1).

In addition, nationwide studies question the relationship between high school graduation and college readiness. Greene and Forster reported in a 2003 working paper for the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research that while 70 percent of all students in United States public schools graduate, only 32 percent are actually qualified to attend four-year colleges at graduation (www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_03.htm [2] 1). They determine "qualification" based on three characteristics: completing high school, taking the minimum requisite courses for admission to virtually all colleges, and achieving minimum competency on a national reading test (11–12). It is interesting to note that this national survey corroborates Maine's findings, highlighting the Northeast as a region in which high school graduation rates are higher than the national average, but college readiness rates are lower (15). Another study sponsored by a consortium of universities that belong to the Association of American Universities, "Mixed Messages: What State High School Tests Communicate about Student Readiness for College," studied 66 exams in twenty states and found that "state high school exams bear an inconsistent relationship to the knowledge and skills necessary for college success" (1).

Exploratory Work: Finding the Right Research Questions

Researching the transition to college writing in a way that includes both high school and college voices requires including both groups early in the process. In the fall of 2004, I carried out three exploratory focus group meetings and five targeted "key informant" interviews with public college teachers working in first-year composition programs, first-year public college students, and public high school teachers. I also participated in several informal discussions with the Maine Composition Coalition—faculty and WPAs from many of the public university and community college institutions—about first-year composition and college readiness. The nature of the schools represented and the communities they serve was not part of the focus of this preliminary exploration, but the key informants' perspectives rounded out the more local concerns of individual faculty and institutions.

This exploratory work was designed to ensure the development of research questions that are thoroughly grounded in high school and college experiences, based on high school and college voices.

The focus groups were:

- Mt. Blue High School English faculty: John Logan, Leanne Condon, and Dan Ryder.
- Maine Writing Project members (high school faculty): Cynthia Dean, Tanya Baker, Maureen Montgomery, Lincoln MacIsaac, Dave Boardman, and Debra Butterfield. This second group included a mix of faculty teaching in the middle school, high school and college settings, although all teach high school as part of their load. Some were pursuing doctoral work at various stages.
- University of Maine-Farmington students in First Year Seminar and ENG 100

The targeted informant interviews included:

- Ann Dean, Director of Composition, University of Southern Maine and representative for writing issues to the Chancellor's College Readiness Task Force.
- Lynne Miller, Chair of the Chancellor's College Readiness Task Force and Director, Maine Partnerships.
- Kika Stump, Chair of the Maine Council for English Language Arts, full-time high school teacher.

- Mary Schwanke, The director of the University of Maine-Farmington portion of an NSF project on high school and college curriculum in the sciences and mathematics.
- Richard Kent, The director of the Maine Writing Project and Education faculty member at University of Maine-Orono.

Focus group and key informant research methods were chosen because of the exploratory nature of the preliminary research stage. These methods are most appropriate for exploring participants' knowledge about an issue, learning the language and vocabulary of a particular group, and generating hypotheses for further testing; they "generate new ideas or ways of looking at an issue because, by definition, the process is open-ended" (www.communication.gc.ca/services [3] 2). The National Science Foundation *Handbook on Designing Mixed Method Evaluations* suggests that focus groups are particularly valuable for "generating data and insights that would be unlikely to emerge without the interaction found in a group," (www.her.nsf.gov/HER/REC/pubs/NSF97–153/CHAP_HTM [4] 9) while key informants offer information that captures the essence of the issue being discussed, are knowledgeable about project participants, and can help a researcher to better understand both the issue and the participants (www.her.nsf.gov/HER/REC/pubs/NSF97–153/CHAP_HTM [4] 14). They offer "insider" points of view and are helpful in creating connections with other relevant groups (15).

The focus groups interviewed for this exploratory research met in informal settings (e.g., a café, a high school classroom, and a college classroom). Each group met for an hour and a half. In two sessions I acted as moderator, posing general questions and prompting participants to give more detail as needed; in the third, a Maine Writing Project director acted as moderator. The general questions, listed in the appendix, were developed from the directions provided by the literature review and the guidance provided by the key informant interviews, but were designed to allow each focus group discussion to shape itself based on participants' priorities for discussion. Participants' responses were recorded in notes I took as each participant spoke. The overall purpose of the discussions, as presented to the participants, was to identify issues of concern that would generate the research questions to pursue in the 2005–2006 research project. My main concern as the principal researcher was to develop those research questions collaboratively through this process, rather than imposing them based on my own concerns or priorities.

Eight main areas of concern emerged for future research. They are listed here, with sample specific questions generated by the participants provided after each question.

1. How do the writing process, peer review and collaborative writing play out in each setting?

High school teachers: We require at least 2–3 drafts and spend 50–60 hours a week responding to writing. We hear that in college there is no drafting work. What is the college drafting process like? Why don't newer teachers coming into the high school system understand the writing process; why haven't they learned how to teach it? How do we reorient students' "three edits we're done" approach and help them to be open to change in their drafts?

College teachers: How is the drafting process actually taught in high school classes? Is the high school drafting process just a series of mechanical edits? Are students in both high school and college learning to produce poor first drafts in order to get credit for improving them?

Both groups: How do we let students know that we ourselves struggle as writers on a daily basis, often turning in less-than-perfect pieces because of deadlines?

2. What forms and structures are de facto prioritized for students' writing? Why?

High school teachers: How can we help our students to understand that the five-paragraph-essay is only one piece in the larger picture of writing abilities? We feel caught between the statewide test, "local assessments," and wanting to do what pedagogical and composition theory says we should. Do college teachers realize that the state-wide assessment test is the centerpiece of high school writing through the junior year, making it, for many students, the final year of unified required writing instruction? Do college teachers know that the state assessment "constructed response" assignment is the most frequently taught form, but that in order to succeed with respect to the Maine Learning Results,[8] students must know different traditional genres and know different ways to produce them (not just one)? If the five-paragraph-essay is discouraged in first-year composition, why is it expected in some other college courses? Has writing changed since our own college experiences?

College teachers: Can the new SAT writing prompt act as a catalyst for exchanges about student writing and about our priorities in high school and college writing courses?

What's in the standardized Maine Learning Results and how do they affect high school classes? Do the Maine Learning Results actually matter in college writing? Which don't? Can innovative assignments like multi-genre essays still enable student success? Has high school writing changed in the past few years?

3. What do assignment prompts look like: intent, depth, complexity, shape and sequencing?

High school teachers: Can college faculty teach us about sequenced assignments and complex writing prompts? How is the link between analytic ability and creativity being developed in college? How do colleges teach students creativity?

College teachers: How do high school teachers encourage flexibility and strategies for independence in high school writers through the assignments they devise?

Both groups: Why do students do expressive writing well, but "fall apart" when they are asked to produce persuasive writing? Is the implicit hierarchy of expressive writing for "starters" and then, developmentally, other kinds of writing, a legitimate hierarchy?

4. How is written work evaluated, and using what criteria?

High school teachers: How do we help students to internalize standards for good writing? And get students to the point of recognizing for themselves what might be effective or need revision in a piece? On the other hand, how do we un-internalize the need for grading and standards?

College teachers: Why do high school students appear to expect high grades for effort? How can we open a dialogue about "C" standards and about criteria for grading? What do high school teachers point out to their students when they judge an essay?

Both groups: When there are minimum standards at each level, are they actually respected? Have students graduating high school actually mastered the abilities listed in the Maine Learning Results (whether we agree with them or not)? Are students in

first-year composition truly judged on the outcomes a program describes? Is there pressure to pass students?

5. What is the role of research and citation work? How is plagiarism considered?

High school teachers: Is the "research paper" a helpful high school activity? (The high school teachers interviewed assumed that the research paper is still a key college activity.) How is plagiarism considered or discussed in college? How are students taught to read and to integrate textual evidence into their writing in college? What is the relationship to texts read and to authors' authority in college? How do we help students keep their voices and develop effective persuasive or researched thoughts? What about the multigenre essay? Students are very invested in these pieces and value their work with them, but high school colleagues don't always see the value in these innovative pieces. How can we change that?

College teachers: In high school, how do teachers work with research? How do they work with plagiarism? Are they teaching a particular research process?

Both groups: How do we help students to avoid "patchwork research papers"? What can we do when confronted with strategies and perspectives among our students that are not part of our own traditions: heavy reliance on Internet searching, for example, or different assumptions about intellectual property assumptions that seem alien to the academic world? How can we work with students' tendency to get caught up in writing stilted "academia-like" work, losing all personal voice?[9]

6. What is the shape of writing across the curriculum and writing in other subject areas: writing about literature, writing for English class, and "other" writing?

High school teachers: Should students be writing about their feelings in response to literature, or should we help them to develop intellectual points of view? Is the time spent on "English class" writing helpful to students in other high school subject areas? What do students write in other subject areas?

Both groups: Do teachers in other disciplines see the need to teach writing? Do they know how to use writing (such as a journal) to explore content or knowledge, to think, to think through or about subjects and ideas? When we teach students how to write "for English," in particular to write literary analysis or first-year composition essays, is that sufficient? Is the knowledge that students gain "transferable"?

7. How are students motivated to write, to write authentically, to write for an audience?

High school teachers: What is the role for audience considerations? How can we help students to write authentic pieces? Are students being too hand-held in high school, not sufficiently challenged? How would we know? Where should we be saying, "I'll help you step by step," and where, "OK, you're on your own"? How will these decisions help our students' writing and progress?

College teachers: Students are simply not invested in what academia wants them to learn; can high school teachers help us to understand why?

Both groups: What is the role of expressive writing in student motivation: does it help to produce relevance and caring? What is authenticity, authentic writing and authentic assignments, vs. packaged school-based approaches to writing? What can we learn about the necessary artificiality of "school" work in relation to a student's "own" work,

writing that students produce independent of any academic assignment?[10]

8. What rules and conventions seem most influential in each setting?

Both groups:. Where do the myths about not using "I" in college writing begin? One teacher pointed out that writing at selective private colleges in Maine by and large privileges the use of "I," while in high school, students are often taught to avoid it at all costs.

As for other conventions, how can we possibly cover everything? What do we choose or prioritize? What aspects of "correctness" are considered most important in high school or in college, and how do colleagues make decisions about what to prioritize?

In general, focus group participants indicated great interest in finding out more about each other, and in particular about what we mean by "high school writing" and "college writing." Both groups wondered whether there is a single unified kind of writing in either category, and what "getting ready for college writing" actually means. High school faculty expressed frustration that students and parents alike look for "how to do" college writing, what the one right way is, or what the experts say about the right way or wrong way to write. Finally, both high school and college faculty stated that they have neither the time nor the institutionally-supported opportunity to broach these subjects even among themselves, let alone with others across institutional levels.

The student focus groups' results essentially corroborated both the literature review and the faculty focus group results, validating the research questions we will pursue in the larger Calderwood project. Students involved in the discovery focus groups expressed great frustration about the lack of communication between high school and college writing programs. They are quite aware of the gaps described and frustrated by unexpected transition issues. They report major shifts in college expectations; they acknowledge not taking high school exit assessments seriously and are quick to offer advice to their high school counterparts about what they wish they had been told in high school.[11]

III. A Project for Change: The Calderwood Conversations

How might we determine together what is best for high school and college students in writing courses, in a way that supports the transition students must make? What is each of us trying to do, and why? What do we think it will accomplish? How are we doing it, and why? What theories support and explore what we do?

Literature that works at these questions is available at both the high school and the college levels, but specific to each level. The point here is **not** to claim that these questions have not already been treated, that no answers have been proposed, although perhaps many teachers working in the trenches of both high school and college have not yet been part of the conversation. The point is that high school and college teachers and teacher educators are by and large not talking with each other about these questions, reading each other's literature, discussing each other's practices and their contexts.

College faculty need the exchange as much as high school faculty. It serves no one for us to operate as if our students have no history[12] (or worse, a defective history). We can become better teachers through an informed understanding of students' various and complex high school writing experiences. At the same time, both the exploratory focus

group discussions reported here and larger theoretical and cognitive-developmental research projects have made clear the fact that high school practices should not be college practices simply begun earlier. The literature reviewed suggests that socially, practically, and cognitively there are strong reasons for looking at high school writing instruction as something other than a "feeder" for college writing.

The "Calderwood Conversations" project will offer eight monthly conversations in the 2005–2006 academic year, for high school and college writing faculty, targeting the questions or topics identified by the focus groups. The focus group work has provided, as we have seen, a series of questions about which high school and college writing teachers might begin to dialogue.[13] These questions form the basis of the agenda for the one-year collaborative project I describe here. The conversations will be modeled after projects like one in Vancouver, British Columbia, orchestrated by Wendy Strachan,[14] whose high school-college "dialogues" project helped us to see the value of creating two complementary groups, a smaller core working group and a larger discussion group. Our project will be guided by a small planning group of three high school and three college writing teachers, advised by many of the same people who participated in the focus group discovery stage.

The exploratory process has been helpful not only because it involved high school faculty from the beginning, but also because we are now able to adjust our information-gathering approach based on the first phase. It has enabled us to realize that any teachers involved in continuing dialogue need to feel ownership of the conversations or projects. This ownership must be real—and that means we must set aside preconceived notions about what we expect to encounter or to prioritize. Focus group participants suggested that the best way to encourage change was to circulate student work and allow others to see exciting student products. They felt this cross-grade level sharing was much more likely to get teachers on board than any form of professional development, and help them to build respect for each other as teachers and colleagues.

The planning group will also propose shared reading of available literature on the high school-to-college transition and theoretical works cited by high school and college teachers as key influences on their composition teaching. This reading will be designed to familiarize each group with theoretical perspectives important to the other.

While the exploratory stage was limited to a few small groups, not necessarily representative, the Calderwood Conversations will be publicized to all public high schools and colleges within a 60-mile range of the location for each conversation. The locations will shift around mid-Maine, in order to offer the most opportunity possible to the broadest range of faculty. In order to encourage participation, participants' travel expenses will be covered and participants will receive a small stipend. Continuing Education Units will be provided for high school faculty.

Each "conversation" will last three hours and will include a meal, a roundtable discussion of readings, and applied work on artifacts (student texts, assignments, classroom activities), made possible by the Calderwood Writing Initiative grant mentioned earlier. Members of the planning committee will take turns leading the discussions and workshops. The planning committee discussions, the roundtable conversations, and the applied work sessions will be systematically recorded by rotating note-takers; the data gathered will be studied by the planning committee and used for proposals for future study, for curricular reform, for additional projects encouraging secondary-postsecondary dialogue, for developing a meta-language for future discussions, and for publication of recommendations for high school and college writing

faculty. In the future, this information might help to improve faculty awareness as high school and college teachers talk with their students. We will track participants' institutional affiliations so that we can carefully study student and teacher demographics, location, and other contextual factors for each participant.

The literature search and the focus group responses have provided some very clear philosophical guidelines for the project. The "one way street of college preparation must become a two-way exchange of rhetorical awareness," Perry reminds us. High school and college students and teachers need to know about how thinking and writing processes develop and why expectations in high school and college are different (Perry 2). "While there can be no doubt about the need for college-prep programs, there is also need for free and equal exchange of information, heuristics, values and assumptions between secondary and post-secondary spheres" (2). In particular, projects must not be built as ways to "help" high school teachers (3), but a process of finding out what would be useful for each group (Budden et al. 76).

The Calderwood project will answer the call made by Tremmel and others to "open negotiations on how we might reroute and regrade [our] common path, starting with conversations about what life would be like if we were to remove some of the impediments that keep us apart" (13). He envisions the same complementarity evoked by Alsup, calling for "alliances based on our consilient actions and needs in order to build a broader, more coherent mutually supportive academic and institutional base for ourselves" (1).

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) appears to be an ideal setting for trying out such an alliance. It is a selective public liberal arts university with a strong teacher education program. It recently participated in a three-year National Science Foundation (NSF) project bringing together high school and college faculty and secondary education majors in science and math. The local high school, Mt. Blue High School, offers student teaching and practicum experiences to many UMF education majors; Mt. Blue English faculty are actively involved in professional development and have participated in National Writing Project activities; 10–20 Mt. Blue High School students attend UMF each year.

Our project will also include an English secondary education student from UMF (a project assistant for independent study "Writing and the Teaching of Writing" course credit, and a work initiative student funded by UMF for additional project assistance). Students in the regularly scheduled "Writing and the Teaching of Writing" course at UMF will also be invited to the conversations. This inclusion will have the secondary effect of improving the communication between the next generation of high school writing teachers and college composition faculty and modeling both the overall conversation series and the cross-level communication for other schools.

In order to determine the value and success of this collaboration, the planning team will develop specific project goals from the outset and then check the project against those goals mid-year and at the end of the project. We will invite an outside evaluator to look at our project regularly and to assess our progress and effectiveness.

Conclusion

The preliminary, eye-opening experience of focus group meetings and interviews has given me pause. I have learned how difficult it is to avoid thinking that I have the "right" knowledge for my high school colleagues. I have learned that sitting with a group of high school colleagues is a moment in shared concerns and rich exchange. I have learned

that I need to know what they know, and that they might like to know more about my work. I see the spaces for far more opportunity for dialogue.

The insufficient information about what readiness for college writing means and the under-representation of high school faculty voices in published discussions on the subject make projects like the one described here vital to improving our understanding of high school-to-college transition issues. This kind of project is already developing in other settings; consider, for example, a program like New York's Looking Both Ways. That offers fellowships to high school participants. According to Looking Both Ways program material (www.lbw.cuny.edu/ [1]) , these fellowships create the opportunity to collaborate in exploring a research problem or question high school and college faculty define together. The fellowships support classroom inquiry leading to publishable results, through intense seminars and ample opportunity for research and exchange.

I would like to encourage writing faculty to create similar projects, paying particularly close attention to how to craft the project based on the expressed interests of high school and college writing faculty and how to frame the project in the context of available research. In a year's time, we hope to be presenting new, in-depth information generated by our collaborative work with this project; I expect I will not be the only humbled, yet enlightened, member of our group.

Appendix One: Preliminary Focus Group Questions

- What is on your mind as a writing teacher?
- What do you know about (high school) (college) writing instruction?
- Where have you learned what you know?
- What would you like to know about (high school) (college) writing instruction?
- What do you wish (high school) (college) colleagues knew about your work? About your students?
- What resources inform your composition teaching?
- What are your major challenges as a teacher?
- What are you least and most sure about in your composition teaching?

Each group expanded the discussion beyond these preliminary prompts, based on interests and experiences.

Notes

1 McClelland, Kathleen, et al. "College Preparatory vs. College Reality." Unpublished report to participating schools, South Coast Writing Project and Program in Composition, University of California Santa Barbara, 1990.

2 Some college writing faculty are full time professors with many other responsibilities, including research and publication demands; others are adjuncts teaching at multiple institutions with a variety of pedagogical frames. A large number of first-year composition teachers are graduate students or full-time adjunct faculty. I do not mean to imply that any one group systematically works harder than any other—something that surely differs across individuals more than across situations—only that college writing faculty insisting on imposing certain approaches or methods on high school faculty may not be knowledgeable about the demanding high school context.

3 In a surprising turn, Cobbs notes that the five-paragraph structure was far less omnipresent in the students' high school experiences than she expected, at least in their senior year (181).

4 A notable exception: the National Writing Project's website, rich with resources and researched reports (www.writingproject.org [5]).

5 While this scholarship portrays a vision of secondary school writing that is not overly structured or focused on stifling guidelines, it often remains the ideal proposed in publications rather than actual classroom practice in regulated and standards-based high school classrooms.

6 Jay Simmons described, in a 2004 interview with the author, a Boston-area FIPSE-sponsored project in the 1980s, designed to bring together high school and college students and faculty working on similar writing assignments. While much of the project was successful, he underscores the one apparent failure in the project: high school students, still immersed in the high school setting, did not make progress at the same rate as the college and community college participants even though they were rated as equally strong writers at the outset. He suggests this was partly because they simply did not yet consider themselves to be college students.

7 The Calderwood Writing Initiative, directed by John Brereton, is supported by the Boston Athenaeum.

8 The Maine Learning Results are Maine's standards for success in K-12 education: http://www.state.me.us/education/lres/homepage.htm [6]

9 "Voice" is, of course, a contested concept—highly theorized, differently valued and taught in different contexts. Because this brief article's focus is on the questions raised by the exploratory research, it is not the place for an extended discussion about what is meant by "voice." The subject will most certainly be part of the extended discussions evolving from the 2005–2006 Calderwood Conversations.

10 See, for example, Cynthia Selfe's work about students who read and write extensively outside of school, for their own purposes, but are judged minimally competent as readers and writers in school settings. The students' teachers in Selfe's study were unaware of students' literate activities outside of school.

11 Students described, for example, surprise that few writing assignments take the shape of a five-paragraph-essay in college, and that they were not writing everywhere—sometimes not at all—in their first college semester. Students noted, in their high school experiences, never having had to juggle many complex ideas, organize, synthesize ideas, develop, elaborate, defend, or explore ideas, and rarely writing essays longer than three pages. Students had not had assignments relate to each other in a series or a sequence. Many reported not reading in high school or, more frequently, remembered reading without discussing what was read. The state assessment was widely reported as not being taken seriously; students reported skipping school or handing tests in blank; others talked of school administrators offering rewards for students who came to school on testing day. Finally, students reported wishing that in college, the "scaffolding" or steps offered for responding to assignments in high school would still be offered in college.

12 I am indebted to Susan Wall at Northeastern University for framing this issue for me years ago, when she pointed out that unfortunately most composition theorists appear to believe academic discourse and the intellectual awakening that accompanies it (in the best of circumstances) begin at the university.

13 The research in preparation for the focus group meetings resulted in an annotated bibliography, available at the end of this article.

14 For more information on this project, see T. Thompson, ed., *Teaching Writing in High School and College,* 2002.

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[1] http://www.lbw.cuny.edu/
[2] http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_03.htm
[3] http://www.communication.gc.ca/services
[4] http://www.her.nsf.gov/HER/REC/pubs/NSF97-153/CHAP_HTM
[5] http://www.writingproject.org

[6] http://www.state.me.us/education/lres/homepage.htm
[7] http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_03/htm
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